

# **The Postsecular, the Secular, and the Religious in *the Golden Legend: Way Out For Postcolonial Nation-States***

**Safeer Hussain**

University of Georgia, Athens, GA, USA & Department of Languages & Cultural Studies at the  
University of Baltistan, Skardu, Pakistan

**Abstract:** The article discusses Nadeem Aslam's novel for its portrayal of the pitfalls of religious nationalism and secularism. With the help of close reading and basic ideas of secularism and postsecularism from Gil Anidjar and Manav Ratti, the paper argues that Aslam's novel presents characters navigating the horrors of religious nationalism and secularism, reaching a possible yet precarious space of postsecularism. The novel utilizes several major symbols and metaphors to achieve its end. The two major metaphors are a utopian island, nestled between a river on all sides, and a book that binds all humanity in one thread. The two symbols embody a burgeoning space of solidarity with their emphasis on oneness, connection, and love across religious, temporal, and spatial boundaries. The paper concludes that Aslam's novel successfully represents the quagmire the postcolonial nation-states of South Asia are stuck in and suggests a postsecular direction for a peaceful future of coexistence.

**Keywords:** Post-secularism, Postcolonial, Nation-States, Secularism, Religious Nationalism

**Email:** [safeer.hussain@uga.edu](mailto:safeer.hussain@uga.edu), [safeer.hussain@uobs.edu.pk](mailto:safeer.hussain@uobs.edu.pk)

## **1. Introduction**

Nationalism had been one of the powerful, uniting forces that harbored resistance movements and struggles for freedom in the past colonies of the world. The idea of a nation, an independent group of like-minded people, or people with a similar ideology of life inhabiting a common geographical territory, has been one of the basic drives for freedom for the formerly colonized of the world. But the very glue of nationalism has been repellent towards the addition and merging of minorities, either racial, ethnic, or religious, in independent post-colonial nations like India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh; countries with a racial, ethnic, or religious majority and some underprivileged minorities. These minorities have suffered internal colonialism, majoritarianism, and subalternity in the very nations that once stood against such cruelties and aimed for a piece of land promising peace, equity, equality, fraternity, dignity, and community for all. Manav Ratti, in his book *The Postsecular Imagination: Postcolonialism, Religion and Literature* [1], has discussed the pitfalls of nationalism, majoritarianism, and the horrors and violence attached to it in India and Sri Lanka, with the help of Michael Ondaatje, [2] Salman Rushdie, Allan Sealey, [3] Shauna Singh Baldwin, Amitav Ghosh, and Mahasweta Devi's

novels. Ratti's book analyses how all those diaspora writers (except Devi) utilize the literary space to think through and visualize alternative ways of being and living; alternatives to the failing nationalism and secularism in the form of post-national or postsecular modes. In this essay, I will argue, similar to what Ratti presents in his book, that *The Golden Legend* by Nadeem Aslam stages a postsecular direction for Pakistan (and by extension for other South Asian countries). The novel, as I will analyze, represents the major characters navigating between the appalling state of religious fanaticism and secularism, and suggests a possible yet precarious postsecular future. In the ensuing analysis and discussion, I will argue that the novelists Ratti discusses and Nadeem Aslam's *The Golden Legend*, which this paper focuses on, utilize similar literary symbols and methods to arrive at very similar, if not the same, conclusions. I will demonstrate that *The Golden Legend* both presents the pitfalls of religion, nationalism, and secularism in the post-independent, postcolonial nation-states of the subcontinent and imagines a postsecular, post-national space to be a possible but precarious way out of all the chaos they are currently experiencing in their national lives, just the way *The Postsecular Imagination* does.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

Before moving on to the discussion of how Aslam delineates a religion-rife Pakistan and its horrors, and secularism as almost an equivalent failure, it is pertinent to summarize his novel. The novel is the story of two Muslim architects, Massud and his wife Nargis, living in a fictional city, Zamana, in Pakistan, surrounded by a poor Christian neighborhood of Badami Bagh. On careful observation, we could safely say that the city of Zamana is a fictional stand-in for Lahore city. Closely related to Massud and Nargis is a Christian family of Lily, his wife Grace, and their 19-year-old daughter Helen. Later in the story, a young boy named Imran, a run-away member of a Muslim militant organization operating in Kashmir, enters their life when Massud is caught in the gunfire between an American diplomat/covert CIA agent and two possible jihadis. Imran donates blood to a dying Massud in the hospital, but his blood is unable to save him. The corrupt intelligence agencies of Pakistan want Nargis to forgive the blood of her husband in return for blood money from America, but she is unwilling and thus harassed and later tortured by Major Burhan, a representative of the agencies. Meanwhile, Lily has developed a romantic relationship with the widowed daughter of the cleric of the neighborhood mosque.

His wife was killed by a Muslim a few years back, and the killer was not punished properly and was set free after a single year of incarceration.

The house of Lily and Helen, and other Christian houses of Badami Bagh, Zamana, are attacked and set fire to by a Muslim mob, when it is learned that Lily is having an affair with the Muslim cleric's daughter, Ayesha, and that he has been entering the mosque for clandestine meetings with her at night. This is considered blasphemy by the Muslim mob, also instigated by a piece of writing that Helen had published in a local magazine, where she questioned the existence of 'djinn's' (genies). Helen, Nargis, and Imran, who happened to be invited to Nargis' house that night, fled first to an abandoned cinema on the outskirts of Zamana and later to an island, probably on the farther fringes of the city. Whereas Lily, who was not at his house during the mob attack, lives on the streets trying to disguise himself after the attacks. Ayesha is kept housebound after the incident and not allowed to venture outside her abode.

### **3. Discussion and Analysis**

Through this novel, I contend that Aslam attempts to outline what religious nationalism and secularism could evolve into when sponsored by a state, and in the case of Pakistan, instrumentally utilized by a political and military elite for their corrupt purposes. He very candidly presents the brutal treatment minorities receive in a Muslim-majoritarian Pakistan, and in doing so, gestures towards the failures of the concepts of religion, nationalism, and nation-states. Within the very first ten pages of the novel, we learn that Grace, Lily's wife and Helen's mother, had been killed, and her killer had not been punished justly:

There were several witnesses to the crime, but the murderer was a Muslim, and this was Pakistan. The police were initially reluctant to even register a case. Eventually, however, the man was sentenced to life imprisonment—but the day before yesterday, Nargis and Massud learned that Grace's killer had been released, as a reward for having memorized the entire Koran. He had served less than a year in prison [4].

Aslam sets the tone very early that Pakistan is a failing religious country, where religion (Islam) is a tool for both the state and people for their advantage. On the very next page, we learn what happened when Nargis and Massud filed the case against Grace's killer, and the verdict was passed against the killer:

A few days after he delivered the verdict, the judge was stabbed to death as he left his house in the morning, and that on several occasions over the coming weeks, men on

motorcycles slowed down outside the lawyer's home to spray the interior with bullets from machine guns, one bullet narrowly missing his young child, until he and his family went into hiding [4].

This is the Pakistan Aslam sketches in his novel, where not even the Muslim judge and lawyer are spared from a justified decision against a Muslim in favor of a Christian.

While drawing the overtly religious Pakistan, Aslam sets his novel in Zamana, in the poor Christian neighborhood of Badami Bagh. Although Zamana is a fictional name, a reader familiar with Pakistan would promptly guess that Zamana represents Lahore, as the geographical clues scattered throughout the narrative, such as Badami Bagh, aptly mark the city as Lahore. Setting his main characters in Badami Bagh is a deliberate choice by Aslam:

As the name suggests, it was once an orchard of almond trees. It had stood on the northern outskirts of the city for almost two hundred years. In 1857, some of the leaders of the Mutiny [the mutiny of 1857 against the British Empire in the subcontinent] had hidden in the orchard's thick groves, plotting their attacks; and later, once the Mutiny had been put down, the British had hanged them from the branches of the same trees [4].

The Christian community living oppressed and internally colonized in the same place where once the whole nation of the subcontinent was oppressed and colonized, and their freedom fighters hanged, presents an interesting situation. Like *Animal Farm* by Orwell [5], the once colonized and oppressed have themselves turned into the colonizers and oppressors, in the same exact place.

Further in the novel, the list of the horrors suffered by the minority Christian community gets long and varied. We learn the extent of the inculcation of hatred towards Christians when a boy of about ten or eleven comes from a nearby shop to deliver groceries at Massud & Nargis' house; finds a glass of juice offered to him by Helen; says that it is forbidden in religion (Islam) to take a glass of juice from a Christian (which is clearly not based on any Islamic teaching), and sometime later returns with a knife to cut Helen claiming "[his] mother had told [him]" that "Christians have black blood" [4]. This marks the hatred and violence injected into the imagination of the general masses of Pakistan against other religions or other ways of having faith, God, and different ways of life, rooted in the very core of Muslim society and people in Pakistan. We also learn from Lily that "when he was a teenager, angry at the daily – sometimes hourly – humiliations he had to endure at the hands of Muslims, he had often felt that if Pakistan

were a person, he would kill it. Tired of being a non-citizen – half citizen at best” (Aslam, 2017, p. 70), [4] forced by the Muslim society to “[enter] Zamana’s sewers at the age of eight,” which gave him a life-long stammer [4]. We find unbelievable events of hatred when we read that “Christians were in prison for drinking water from a Muslim’s glass” [4]. Moreover, from the ruminations of Nargis, we come to know of the surprising as well as shocking fact that Nargis was a Christian named Margaret, who was once mistaken for Nargis in college. When she was treated as an equal for the first time by people considering her a Muslim, she had considered perpetuating the mistake. Later, when Massud came into his life, she fell in love with him, and fears of his reaction kept her confession at bay. From the ramblings of her thoughts, we learn about the constant abuses she and her sister Seraphina suffered at the hands of Muslims; her sister was once taken to the police station by the police, and returned several days later, brutally raped and tortured. Her sister had committed suicide after a period of physical and psychological agony.

The violence and hatred of religion and religious fanaticism do not stop at the poor minorities only. It also extends to those who are not considered ‘true’ Muslims by the fanatics, especially by members of the militant organization who had put up in the mosque neighboring Nargis’ and Lily’s house. A monthly magazine published in Zamana “had received threats regarding some of its content” [4], probably from the members of the same militant organization. One day, when Helen is visiting the office of the magazine, members of the militant organization attack it, kill the guard on duty, hold the staff hostage, and try to reason with them by telling them why they were about to be killed. They told the staff that their magazine had been publishing blasphemous material and that it had “turned down a paid advertisement from a group of religiously concerned persons that condemned the blasphemous cartoons” published by some newspapers in Denmark and France [4]. The terrorists are also piqued when the editor tells them that Pakistan’s blasphemy law was being misused and that it was a ‘black law’. The editor is killed some moments later, and then several of the contributors to the magazine are also shot down one by one. Helen is also about to be killed when the police arrive, and the militants run away. In another incident, even the old cleric of the mosque at Badami Bagh is taunted by the fanatic militant men for being too soft and not adhering to the customs of religion rigidly as they did.

Aslam portrays that the appalling situation of the country becomes more complex when the corrupt ruling elite also uses force to shut down any possible resistance or dissenting voice from

anyone, Muslim or otherwise. A shocking example is of Massud's brother, who "was a journalist and was found [dead] by the roadside. Tortured to death soon after he began investigating a story about the military-intelligence agency" [4], "the first sentence in all of his notebooks had been, *War will drown in the writer's inkwell*" (Italics in original) [4]. The major from military intelligence, Burhan, who harasses and tortures Nargis to forgive the killer of her husband, is another example of military institutions and elite serving themselves and their agendas rather than the public or the country. Later in the novel, when the same major visits Nargis's uncle, bishop Solomon, the bishop rightfully tells the major that they serve the state, not the people of Pakistan. The statement refers to the state being controlled by the political, military, and religious elite, indulging in self-serving rather than serving the public. Thus, Pakistan is presented in a cruel quagmire of religious violence and extreme intolerance, compounded by the corruption of all kinds of elite (political, military, and religious), empty of all voices of dissent and resistance.

In presenting such a horrifying state of affairs, especially concerning religious minorities in Pakistan, Aslam seems to target not only the religious nationalism prevalent in Pakistan but also to question the very foundations of the country: the cry for Pakistan on the grounds of difference of religion from Hindus made by Muslim leadership during the last few decades of British imperial rule in India. Asking for separate territories in the name of religious differences culminates in what the militants tell Helen at the time of the attack at the magazine's office, just before the arrival of the police:

They had asked her her name and had immediately connected it with the piece of writing in which the djinns were mentioned without due reverence.

They had asked her what she thought she was doing in Zamana, what she thought she was doing in Pakistan. 'You should go and live in a Christian country. This is a country for Muslims [4].

Thus, Aslam points to the irony in demanding a separate state in the name of religious differences because then each religious group or each racial, ethnic, or linguistic group in the country could go on asking for separate territories for itself, creating a never-ending cycle of division and factions, without any possibility of living together, respect, tolerance, love, and fellowship. In highlighting the absurdity of all this, Aslam is arguing for a possible post-national

and postsecular direction and future for Pakistan and India, outside of the constructs of nation-states, without the state sponsorship of any majoritarian ideology.

*The Golden Legend* does not just criticize religion (Islam), but it sheds light on the failings of secularism or secular societies as well. Although the novel does not deal with the ills of secularism in the West, it does point to one or two incidents that reflect the sorry state of secularism there. The first is the racism suffered by Muslims, which Aslam presents through a militant during the attack on the magazine office. The militant says:

I lived as an immigrant in a number of Western countries. You have no idea how your beloved secular world treats our fellow Muslims. My wife was spat on by men on three separate occasions because she wore a burqa. We are treated like scum all across Western countries, worse than dogs, and when we complain, we are told we are inventing grievances, that what we have are scars without wounds [4].

There are countless examples of such acts of racism orchestrated against Muslims, and against Muslim women, especially when they wear the Hijab or Burqa. The militant's comment might also be explained in terms of Hijab bans in schools and other academic or state institutions that Muslim women have been facing for a long time, all of which refers to the failure of the rhetoric of pluralism, inclusiveness, and multiculturalism bragged by secularism and Western secular states.

The second thing, also pointed out by the same militant, echoes what Anidjar refers to in his essay 'Secularism' that secularism "still has the bigger bombs—it is the history of bombing—and the bigger police, security, military, and financial forces. It builds bigger walls. It leads the war on terror" [6]. The militant narrates that the suicide bomber of the Boston marathon "wrote messages on the walls of the boat [where he lay dying after the bombings] with blood – his own blood. Get out of Iraq, he wrote. Get out of Afghanistan. All this will stop when you stop killing and humiliating Muslims" [4]. It clearly refers to the so-called 'war against terror' started by the Bush administration soon after the tragedy of 9/11. We also learn from Ayesha, the widowed daughter of the cleric, that American drone bombings had killed her husband and several others in the Waziristan area of Pakistan. Although several militants in the area were killed by the drone attacks, there were innocent ones as well. Ayesha's only son, Billu, had his legs blown away in the blast, leaving him crippled for his whole life. The American diplomat/covert CIA agent's fire killing Massud, and his diplomatic immunity as well as Pakistan's military agency's torture and

coercion over Nargis for the killer's forgiveness on the demands of the CIA, is another example of how imperial secularism is.

Not only the failing secularism in the West, but Aslam also outlines the failures of secularism in India as well, with the help of Kashmir. Imran, our runaway Jihadi, belongs to Kashmir, and from him we get to know a great deal about Indian atrocities in Kashmir. Imran himself has a defective arm, thanks to an Indian soldier beating his mother during the last stages of her pregnancy, and later, Imran was born with a broken arm. Almost all the adults from Imran's life had been taken away by Indian soldiers for questioning, where they used "electric drills during interrogation" [4], and thus they never returned. Even their bodies or graves could not be found, as in a particular incident, people claim to see that:

They had seen the Indian soldiers carry three bodies wrapped in sheets into the forested hills and return without them two hours later. [The people] searched the vicinity and discovered the shallow graves, and had identified the buried men by the clothes they wore. One of the bodies was headless. The faces of the other two were without skin, all flesh torn away to prevent identification. One of these was still alive when they dug him up, though he died soon afterwards [4].

That is why Imran's senile grandfather asked him and his brother to carry seeds of one kind of flower or another in their pockets so that if they go missing, he/people will know where to look for, "if they have buried [you] in a shallow grave, the bulbs will germinate and let us know where [you are]" [4]. There is a great deal of detail about the barbaric treatment of Kashmiri Muslims by the Indian forces in the novel.

With the Hindu majoritarianism and the barbarities attached to it, the secular India seems similar to religious Pakistan in other respects as well, e.g., the corrupt elite and their silencing of all dissenting views and voices. After a violent visit to Imran's village in Kashmir, "when the soldiers left, the villagers managed to inform a journalist in Srinagar of the three bodies in the shallow graves in the hills. The day after the story appeared in the newspaper, the journalist's corpse was discovered by the roadside" [4]. This incident, very similar to that of Massud's journalist brother in Pakistan, explicitly portrays the dictatorial, corrupt, majoritarian nation-states and their political and human failures.

Where almost all of the major events of religion-based hatred and violence that Aslam presents happening in Pakistan are in fact true (although names and places a little altered to avoid a

complete replication of facts), we also note that Aslam does pick and choose all the incidents of hatred or violence against religious others or minorities in Pakistan scattered over space and time into one narrative, and thus exaggerates the circumstances and fate of religious minorities in Pakistan. Whereas mob attacks on the religious centers and neighborhoods of religious minorities have actually been happening in Pakistan, and mob lynching and blasphemy accusations against minorities, especially Christians, the presentation of all Muslims as always hateful, intolerant, and violent is hyperbolic. Aslam's project seems to designate everyone who believes in a religion as violent, full of hatred towards all human beings who do not believe in their religion. He presents only a few characters that do not possess the violence and hatred of religion, and those are either foreign-educated, non-practicing Muslims (e.g., Massud) or non-Muslims (e.g., Margaret as Nargis, Helen, Lily). Even the soft-mannered old Muslim cleric is shown to always carry an 'encyclopedia of sins' in his hands all the time. Aslam portrays Muslims as violent even as they pray, hitting their foreheads forcefully on the ground while bowing before God during their obligatory prayers every day. Imran appears to be an exception, but he is also a character who has run away from religion, or more correctly, from the religion that is nothing but violence. In this instance again, we see Aslam equating religion or Islam to militarism or Jihadism. His novel seems to "[participate] in a set of devices that make religion (the religion of the others, that is, or their nationalism, primitivism, militarism, and terrorism) more of an ominous danger" [6].

Moreover, what could have been considered as examples of war against religion (Islam) by the kind of secularism Said, Asad, and Anidjar expose, Aslam seems to justify that secularism in its 'war against terror'. The case of American bombings in Waziristan in Pakistan, where Ayesha's husband and others were killed, seems to be almost justified since they had been harboring terrorists and jihadis among themselves, as those Kashmiris had been complicit with the guerrilla jihadis from Pakistan. Moreover, Aslam time and again shows common folk of Pakistan as loving, caring, respectful towards each other, but when they sense that the other person has a different religion, their love turns to hatred, if not violence, in no time. The only form of Islam Aslam favors is that of Saints, as he presents the Charagar Mausoleum of a Saint as a space of convergence, community, selflessness, and a space where people of all sects and religions gathered, as well as the fugitive characters of his novel. That place again is suicide-bombed by the militant organization, leading Lily to be killed by the police in their attempts to capture him

as a possible suicide-bomber. It explicitly suggests that Aslam sees religion as the root of all this evil; otherwise, the people could be good and compassionate.

Varied may be the consequences and outcomes, Aslam's contention is with the very phenomenon of the nation-state, particularly those of Pakistan and India, which have turned into nothing better than living hells for their religious, ethnic, or racial others. Such "political systems, concepts, and forms of organization—such as state concepts like multiculturalism and secularism" (Preface xvii) [1] as well as religious nationalism, become more complex and problematic when it is sponsored by the state, as we have seen that state adoption of a particular view regarding religion becomes one of the key reasons for producing majoritarianism and conflict and violence in a society. The situation even worsens in religion-based societies where the disdain, conflict, and violence seep deep down and produce binaries within the religion itself, between its various sects. Secularism, especially when analyzed as Christianity reincarnated, provides no less of a problem than religion. Rather, we see that the very constructs of secularism and religion, the binaries of secular/sacred, are invented by a group of powerful elites, with the help of intellectual elites, and when it is taken up by states as state policy, no good is going to come out of it [6]. Thus, *The Golden Legend* presents both societies failing: one where we have state-sponsored religion (Pakistan), and one where we have state-sponsored secularism (India and the West).

Aslam's novel, as we have seen, thinks through the questions of religion, nationalism, religious nationalism, nation-state, and secularism; issues that are very pertinent for many of the independent post-colonial nations, especially the nations of Pakistan and India. *The Golden Legend*, so far as I have argued, presents the pitfalls of religion in nation-states that sponsor religious views or sides on a state level, and how religion-based nationalism turns into violent majoritarianism, making the life of all kinds of religious minorities a living hell; imparting excruciating physical, psychological, and economic wounds that run deep into the body, soul, and psyche of the poor victims. We have also seen that it apparently rejects secularism as a possible way forward by presenting the failures of secularism in India (a self-proclaimed secular state) and the United States. Now I shall turn to the discussion of how this novel, much like those by Rushdie, Ondaatje, and others discussed by Ratti, presents a post-secular situation as a possible state of relief from the terroristic nature of religion, majoritarianism, and fanaticism. The postsecular in *The Golden Legend* is manifested in the form of two symbols: an island being

the first, and a fictional book named “That They Might Know Each Other,” presented in the novel as written by Massud’s father as the second.

The island was owned by Nargis and her husband, who had planned to erect places of worship for not only Muslims, but for Hindus and Christians as well, which “had been the original idea, the ideal. A mosque, a temple, and a church – standing close to each other” [4]. We also learn that “the mosque had four entrances. When she and Massud decided to build it, it was with the idea that people belonging to all four sects of Islam would come to worship here, entering through different doors but converging at a common prayer hall at the center” [4]. Like *The English Patient*, and the other novels discussed by Ratti, *The Golden Legend* also creates a place which seems to be outside space and time, ripped off the identities of not only region and religion (as we will see), but also bearing no explicit marks of space and time, an island surrounded by river on all sides, connected to the outside world with only “a half-fragmented bridge. A wall stood along most of the island’s circumference” [4], and a dusty, lonely road that seems to lead nowhere. This island, with its pluralistic structure and the bonds of friendship, compassion, and love between the three fugitives of various religions it harbors, fleeing from both religion and secularism, stands out as symbolizing a possible postsecular way of living together. Similarly, Aslam’s mosques, churches, and other religious buildings are emptied of their religious meanings and thus secularized. In his novel, like those of Ondaatje and Rushdie, “the structures of conventional religion are present, but they are emptied of their doctrinal meanings” [1], and “religion’s signifiers become dismantled when they no longer signify the doctrines, narratives, and dogmas of conventional religion, or expect their believers to believe or follow them as such” [1]. We find the love of Helen and Imran beginning and growing on the island, love between a Christian and a runaway Jihadi. Earlier, we have also seen the love of Lily, a Christian, and Ayesha, a widow of a Jihadi, being fostered in a mosque. Moreover, much like the detranscendentalization Ondaatje does, Aslam’s Mosque or the Church on the island do not ask or prompt Imran, Nargis, or Helen towards violence or any religious action. The diversity of religions of Aslam’s characters getting together in a place devoid of religious, racial, or other differences: Nargis (part Muslim, part Christian), Helen (Christian), and Imran (a Muslim) hints towards what Ratti explains as ‘what might come ‘after’ nation’. We see the same elements of love, friendship, and community across the divides of religion in the island. Moving on, Ratti discusses how Ondaatje’s novel performs “the collapse of identities and constructs—nation

among them” [1], “in the form of the friendship and community that establishes itself in the villa” [1]. We see the same collapse here, as the identifiers of religion no longer exist in the island, or if they do, they do not evoke their conventional meaning, like the villa in Ondaatje’s novel. In Ondaatje’s novel, where his characters take off the clothes of nationalities, our Helen and Imran stay naked in each other’s company within the mosque where they are residing, in a relationship of love and making love, drinking alcohol with Nargis.

Aslam’s postsecular symbol of a deterritorialized utopian island and its inhabitants not only contains the postsecular values of love, friendship, and companionship, but also a kind of ‘faith’ in each other’s friendship, compassion, and love. In the deterritorialized and detranscendentalized space of the island, “an anticommunitarian communitarianism” (as termed by Leela Gandhi) [7] or “an assemblage that might appear to be beyond the particulars of identity markers like nation, family, or society” emerges “from the real crises of material realities, including violence. At the same time, the villa [or in our case, the island] comes to function as an “enchanted” space, where all its inhabitants are removed from their personal and national ties and thus have the privilege of “creating anew” some form of affective community” [1].

The second major postsecular symbol that Aslam creates is the book written by Massud’s father titled “That They Might Know Each Other”. Its importance merits a longer descriptive quote:

It was 987 pages long, and it was an acknowledgment and celebration of the countless ideas and thoughts that had travelled over the ages from one part of the planet to another. It outlined and examined how disparate events in the history of the world had influenced each other, the hidden or forgotten contributions that one set of humans had made towards the happiness and knowledge of another. Traditions and histories had always mingled, and nothing in the East or the West was ever pure [4].

We clearly see what kind of a symbol Aslam creates here. The book binds all human civilizations, religions, and regions together in a single thread of shared, common ideas, influences, and knowledge, linking everyone to every other one in its effort to trace the spatial and temporal movement of ideas, knowledge, and, most importantly, happiness transnationally. Another interesting thing the book does is that it archives “the hidden or forgotten contributions” from the subaltern of history, without which postsecularism would be incomplete. This postsecular symbol is mutilated, and several hundred pages of the book are torn down by the major from Pakistan’s military agency when he harasses Nargis to forgive the American killer.

In most of the latter part of the novel, all three main characters often occupy themselves in sewing together the torn pages of the book using a golden thread. Helen and Imran sew their shirts to the pages when they attempt to simultaneously sew the pages and engage in physical pleasures. The title of the novel 'The Golden Legend' probably refers to that book, that shows how humanity, and civilizations are connected in ways that are not apparent, and that literature and the values of love, friendship, compassion and dignity could bind us all together in a space beyond region, religion and secularism, in a postsecular bond, the way Helen and Imran and the book become stitched together in an act of love. The very name of the book is a truncated part of a verse from the Quran, stripped of its religious meaning, and used in a secular way (non-religious way) to represent a symbol of postsecularism.

Hence literature, like *The Golden Legend* and the novels Ratti discusses, provides a space for such discursive negotiations of religion, nationalism, and secularism and for the time being provides postsecularism as the best answer to the situation; one which is not a step backwards towards religion, nor a step forward with secularism, rather a conjugation of the good or harmless qualities of both, taking the values of affect, awe, wonder, love and respect and tying them together in the form of a faith. Ratti and Aslam, highlight the fact that the role of state in forming, maintaining, or propagating either a religious, or a secular identity is extremely problematic, fraught with disastrous outcomes, and that it is the people themselves that find possibilities and spaces of faith outside these violent realms; spaces where both religion and secularism, in all of their universal or imperial forms, are taken out of their rigid dimensions. It's the people themselves in all these novels that find ways of love, friendship, compassion, and peace without either the need for religion or the hatred of religion. Aslam delineates the postsecular through the symbols of the island and the book, and although they contain religious elements like mosques, temples, and churches, they have been aestheticized and secularized, stripped of their religious meanings, presenting the same places full of militants, like the mosque, as holding possibilities for love and romance. The postsecular values that the novel emphasizes are those of love, compassion, and friendship. The picture Aslam draws of the Pakistani society is bleak; however, ending the novel on an optimistic note points towards the hope Aslam still fosters.

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